New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1949

Volume X, Number 26 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of November 28, 1949

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THEATRE OPENINGS

"That Lady"

"Texas, Li'l Darlin'"

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK POST HOME NEWS
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK SUN

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"Texas, Li'l Darlin' "

The New York Times

NOVEMBER 26, 1949

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Although Texas covers a large area, it is considerably better organized than the musical cartoon entitled "Texas, Li'l Darlin'," which opened at the Hellinger last evening. That is probably the reason why the show is the less entertaining of the two.

For John Whedon and Sam Moore have been cartooning at random—poking fun at Texas, at politics and at the Luce magazines indiscriminately. On their side they have a number of excellent actors, two or three rousing songs by Robert Emmett Dolan and a sunny production designed by Theodore Cooper in the style of either Grant Wood or "Oklahoma!" In fact, there is a lot of entertaining material in "Texas, Li'l Darlin'." But it rambles. Somehow it never comes to the point.

• • •

Kenny Delmar, the magniloquent Senator Claghorn of the radio, is the chief buffoon in this jamboree of Texas politics. A folksy candidate with a large hat and a messy appearance, Mr. Delmar is a hearty mountebank with a hospitable manner. According to the whim of the bookmakers, the opposing candidate is a tall, gangling, whining lad with an excellent baritone voice, Danny Scholl, a graduate of "Call Me Mister."

The function of a book in a musical comedy is not only to tell a story but to present the actors in parts that make use of their talents. In this respect, Mr. Scholl is the luckier of the two principals. He has an opportunity to sing "The Big Movie Show in the Sky"—a ballad of considerable gusto and imagination with the best lyrics Johnny Mercer has composed for any of the songs. And Mr. Scholl, who has a droll sense of humor, makes an amiable evening out of it. Although the book gives Mr. Delmar a chance to rumble and roister amusingly in the earlier scenes, it rapidly loses interest in him and leaves him with only a few vague generalities in the second act. Mr. Delmar is the victim of a notable stranding.

There are several attractive performers in "Texas, Li'l Darlin'." Mary Hatcher radiates some of that southern cheer and sings "They Talk a Different Language" with humor and enthusiasm. As the dynamic chief of a forward-looking national magazine, Loring Smith is a funny caricaturist. For the idea of combining the two subjects of satire in the tale of an ambitious publisher who is looking for a man to make President and thinks he has found him in a disreputable Texas vote-getter named Hominy Smith.

The result is by no means the sort of musical-comedy satire that is likely to make the authors of "Of Thee I Sing" envious, but I thought it made, on the whole, for a bright and entertaining show. Robert Emmett Dolan's music is lively and tuneful, Johnny Mercer's lyrics have a fresh and highly agreeable air of mockery about them, and the book by John Whedon and Sam Moore at least has some amusing points. The playing is pleasant, and, while Kenny Delmar, who was Fred Allen's celebrated Senator Claghorn, is hardly as yet a major stage comic, he has a sense of burlesque that can be very amusing upon occasions.

A Problem

It would be easy to pick flaws in the evening's entertainment, since the book does run down in the second half and the satire is is by no means always properly pointed. But I suspect that the chief trouble with a cheerful, bouncing show lies in a problem which the authors were not quite prepared to face. They wanted to make their Hominy Smith obnoxious and yet keep him a fairly sympathetic figure of comedy, and the attempt to eat their cake and still hold on to it keeps their work from having the satirical bite that might have given it distinction. But there is good fun in it.

One of the most pleasant features of the new show are the lyrics of Johnny Mercer. The mocking quality I have already alluded to is expertly and even rather subtly managed, so that Mr. Mercer can write the words of a cowboy song that, for a terrifying moment, seems to belong to the horrible school of "Ghost Riders in the Sky" until you realize with relief and pleasure that he is making fun of it. He has also devised a love song in which a young man courts his girl in the jargon known as "Time-style," and I think it is particularly good. His lyrics to a number called "Politics" and to a song done by the long-suffering secretaries of the great publisher are likewise notable.

Danny Scholl

Another virtue of the evening is the playing of an excellent young comedian named Danny Scholl as the shy and taciturn ex-GI, who is running on the side of virtue against the dubious Hominy Smith. To hear Mr. Scholl protesting endlessly that one of his fellow veterans is "my partner" is to find yourself in the presence of an engaging and original actor with a genuine gift for human and humorous characterization. It is worth noting, too, that the cast contains a child actress named Betty Lou Keim, who can play a precocious little girl and be not only bearable but likeable.

While Mr. Dolan's music is not as distinctive as Mr. Mercer's lyrics, the songs in "Texas, Li'l Darlin'" are pleasant to listen to and have the attractive virtue of simplicity. The sets and costumes are in the proper mood, and so is the modest dancing. The girls of the story, Mary Hatcher and Kate Murtah, perform their activities efficently, although without arousing much excitement. Loring Smith as the publisher and Fredd Wayne as his yes-man are of great help to the proceedings. I wish the new show were sharper and less easy-going and that it didn't tend to run down, but I enjoyed it nevertheless.

"TEXAS, LI'L DARLIN' "

Musical comedy, with book by John Whedon and Sam Moore; music by Robert Emmett Dolan; lyrics by Johnny Mercer; staged by Paul Crabtree; choreography by Al White, Jr.; settings and lighting by Theodore Cooper; costumes by Eleanor Goldsmith; orchestrations by Robert Russell Bennett; presented by Studio Productions, Inc., and Anthony Brady Farrell Productions at the Mark Hellinger Theatre, November 25, 1949. The cast:

Harvey Small	Loring Smith
John Baxter Trumbull	Charles Bang
Parker Stuart Eliot	Alden Aldrich
William Dean Benson Jr.	Edward Platt
Frothingham Fry	Ned Wertimer
Hominy Smith	Kenny Delmar
Dogie Smith	Betty Lou Keim
Amos Hall	Dante di Paolo
Sherm	Cameron Andrews
Duane Fawcett	William Ambler
Branch Pedley	Ray Long
Delia Pratt	Ronnie Hartmann
Red	Merrill Hilton
Jo Ann Woods	Elyse Weber
Calico Munson	Dorothy Love
Rebecca Bass	Carol Lee
Sally Tucket	Ruth Ostrander
Sue Crocket	Doris Schmitt
Sarah Boone	Arleen Ethane
Belle Cooper	Yvonne Tibor
Dallas Smith	Mary Hatcher
Easy Jones	Danny Scholl
Sam	Jared Reed
Melissa Tatum	Kate Murtah
Stan	Edmund Hall
Herb	Ralph Patterson
Jack Prow	Bob Bernard
Harry Stern	Joey Thomas
Drum Majorette	Jacqueline James

New York Post

HOME NEWS

NOVEMBER 27, 1949

TWO·on·the·AISLE

By Richard Watts Jr.

It is tolerantly and even cheerfully accepted by most other Americans that Texans are a race apart, a little bigger, cockier, more exuberant, more content with themselves, and a lot richer than the rest of us. Their manners are slightly broader, their politicians more flamboyant, and their women more cheerful than are generally to be found elsewhere in these United States. People from other sections of the country tend to poke a little malicious fun at them from time to time, but they always do so with a touch of admiring tenderness. Makers of musical comedies, it seems, are not immune from this amiable habit of Texas-baiting.

The various authors of "Texas, Li'l Darlin'," which opened at the Mark Hellinger Theatre Friday night, were not, however, satisfied to confine their good-natured lampooning to the land of Houston, Crockett, Bowie and "Pappy" O'Daniel. The magazine empire commonly associated with the formidable name of Henry Luce also seemed to them deserving of a little kidding, and they hit upon torrid coquetry with a languid southern accent, Kate Murtah is also comic. And Betty Lou Keim, aged ten at the moment, is frisky enough to come near being the queen of the show.

• • •

These and other performers and dancers ought to make "Texas, Li'l Darlin' " a lively evening of satiric fooling. But the authors never decide what they want to satirize most. Most of the music is commonplace and most of the lyrics are in a similar vein. But the book is the basic weakness of this cheerful-looking show. It wastes the talents of some good performers. It also wastes the most noticeable state in the Union.

Journal American

NOVEMBER 28, 1949

Farrell Musical Could Be Better

By ROBERT GARLAND

"Texas, Li'l Darlin'," which opened Friday at the Mark Hellinger, is Anthony Brady—the "Brady" stands for "B"—Farrell's third Broadway bid for productional recognition. "Hold It," the first, was in association with Sammy Lambert. "All for Love," was likewise. The new one, in association with the Studio Productions which could once more be Mr. Farrell is an improvement on the two that have come and gone before.

So Mr. Farrell gets better as his co-productions come and go. If, in what might be called the short run, "All for Love" was not much better than "Hold It," "Texas, Li'l Darlin'" is. It is better, I dare say, than "Hold It" and "All for Love" put together. Yet it is not as good as it could be. Not even with Senator Claghorn himself in what, to each intent and purpose, is the Darlin' Li'l Texas of the cutie-cutie title.

Its bookmakers, John Whedon and Sam Moore, started out with a good musical-comedy idea. Remembering that "Of Thee I Sing" was a first-rate show, remembering that "Oklahoma" was not a second-rate one, they sensibly decided to combine one with the other, to superimpose a political satire upon a picturesque American locale where the heart-of-gold home folks are disarmingly State-conscious. Darlin' Li'l Texas, say! . . .

So the Lone Star State it is. But without, as was the case in the equally cutie-cutie "Look Ma, I'm Dancin,'" a fully fed-up Texan to come down to the footlights and sing "I'm Tired of Texas."

* * *

Patrons Tire of Texas

Everybody is pretty tired of Texas before the evening at the Mark Hellinger is over. For the original good idea of the John Whedon-Sam Moore libretto is lost in the on-stage shuffle, along with such political satire as might have been superimposed upon the State-conscious American locale. It could have been lost anywhere, but especially in Paul Crabtree's determined non-musical-comedy direction.

Senator Claghorn, who used to be Kenny Delmar and now is Hominy Smith, is a runner-for-office in the Texas, Li'l Darlin' of the musical-comedy's playful designation. Huey Long without harmfulness, he as opposed by Ebay Jones, a Will Rogers without humor. A veteran, with a fellow veteran as "my partner," he is, in Danny Scholl's impersonation, the piece's foremost asset.

If there are complications, I forget them. Oh, yes, I remember a New York publisher called Harvey Small whose national weekly goes by the name of Trend. He and his flock of editors are looking for a typical American runner-for-office. They want to make him President. Hominy Smith is chosen. And all of Trend turns Luce in the puritest pan-handle God ever made His Country.

Of course, Hominy Jones has a daughter. She, of course is in love with his opponent, Easy Smith. Her name is Dallas. Dallas wins Easy. Easy loses Dallas. Dallas and Easy win one another as the final curtain falls.

Here, you see, is a chance for an almost "Of Thee I Sing"-"Oklahoma." But they—the "they" stands for "everybody"—muff it. What, at the Mark Hellinger, you get is a musical comedy that is not as good as it could be. The principals, who are attractive and gifted, work hard. But the directing Mr. Crabtree has them working to their disadvantage. And their material grows more and more pedestrian.

Best of their material is Johnny Mercer's lyrics. "Politics," for example, and the not-so-double entendre of the secretaries' song. Robert Emmett Dolan's accompanying music is not at all their equal. The only song hit—if, by any chance, there is one—is "The Big Movie Show in the Sky." And this, as far as Mr. Dolan's contribution is concerned, might honestly be known as "Mule Train in the Sky."

Taxing it as it comes, Anthony Brady Farrell's third Broadway bid for productional recognition not only could, but should have been better than it is. Considering, that is, the possibilities of its bookmakers' original idea. Its settings by Theodore Cooper, its costumes by Eleanor Goldsmith and its orchestrations by Robert Russell Bennett are good, better and best. Its direction by Paul Crabtree is neither.

"Texas, Li'l Darlin' "—drat the hard-to-typewrite cuty-cuteness of that title!—is, like the well-known bishop's well-known egg, good in spots. Those spots wax more and more infrequent as the evening at the Mark Hellinger wanes.

New York World-Telegram

NOVEMBER 26, 1949

'Texas, Li'l Darlin' Opens, And It's Really a Li'l Honey

As deputy for the ailing Bill Hawkins, I can send him very good news from the Mark Hellinger, where "Texas, Li'l Darlin'" opened last night. Bill, your session on a bed of pain did you out of a whale of an evening.

This new musical comedy is a sparkling combination of political travesty and sharply witty comment on current happenings. It rises to some of its merriest laughter in the lyrics of Johnny Mercer, nearly every singe one of them a small masterpiece of mirth.

You never saw a man rising to new importance faster than Kenny Delmar, whose leading role is a first cousin to the Senator Claghorn he used to play on Fred Allen's radio show. Kenny is not exactly a stranger to the stage but he has been a complete stranger to its more substantial laurels. No longer. Laurels were falling his way from all over the place last night.

Has the Know-How.

The amiable and windy blather-skite he plays is a shrewdly conceived and confidently played figure of comedy. Kenny has a casual ease with his man and is full of instinct about just where laughter lies. Broadway got a new addition to its major comedians last night.

This conniving windbag is campaigning like the very dickens all over his Wild West county, using his beautiful daughter as one of his vote-getting displays. He is also trying to use this beautiful daughter to persuade his opponent—her sweetheart, it happens to be—to withdraw from the race and leave the old gent in peace to filch from the public treasury. The young man is not overly bright but he is stubborn and refuses to quit, even though that means the boy-loses-girl finale to the first act.

The butt of much of the jesting is a certain picture magazine whose title begins with L. Messrs. Truman and Dewey get a good workout in the laughter, too.

Story? Oh, Well—.

This whole thing is not much of a story, of course, but if it's story you are after, get yourself something by Somerset Maugham. This show deals mainly in the inspired work of Kenny Delmar and the abundant humor provided for him by authors John Whedon and Sam Moore and the lyrics of Johnny Mercer. There is one sly song called "Politics," that had the customers clamoring for more until Kenny and his partner, Loring Smith, must have been ready to drop.

Mary Hatcher of the movies and "Oklahoma" is another who is having her first flirtation with solid stage fame. She sings better than most, looks better than most and is a pert little funster. Just a joy to have her around.

Danny Scholl has worked a bit too strenuously in his caricature of her dim-witted but earnest sweetheart. He hits a better stride when his tenor voice is called upon for ballads or patter songs.

In some of the supporting roles [illegible] can grow very fond of Betty Lou Keim, an amusingly sassy little girl, Loring Smith with a burlesque of a big magazine executive and Fred Wayne with an equally broad burlesque of one of his minions.

Humor First

The dance numbers are not elaborate except for one big and colorfully costumed square dance. The groups in the other numbers are mainly small ones copcentrating on the humor of Johnny Mercer—there we are harping on those good songs again. The music by Robert Emmett Dolan comes from a region located somewhere between cowboy and Tin Pan Alley, always both appropriate and tuneful. The settings and costumes are bright and gay, giving their slice of the West a gala carnival flavor.

That is about all there is to your deputy's report, Bill Hawkins. Now get off your couch and walk and make the Mark Hellinger theater your first stop unless you are not as smart as I think you are.

A. C.

Daily Mirror

NOVEMBER 26, 1949

Creaky Book, Dull Score Mar 'Texas, Li'l Darlin'

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The fabulous Anthony Brady Farrell and Studio Productions have teamed to give Broadway another musical comedy, "Texas, Li'l Darlin'," which is certainly no "Oklahoma." The new arrival at the Mark Hellinger Theatre has a wheezy book by John Whedon and Sam Moore and a run-of-the-mill score by Johnny Mercer and Robert Emmett Dolan.

The best thing about the show is some of the Mercer lyrics. The first-nighters liked particularly Johnny's wordage for a satire called "Politics." "The Big Movie Show in the Sky," used for a big production number, sounds too much like "Ghost Riders in the Sky," for comfort.

The story has to do with a publisher of a weekly magazine who sends his staff out in search of a Republican Presidential candidate. One of his bright boys digs up Hominy Smith, a gallus-snapping, platitudinous, not overly honest backwoods politician 'way down in Texas. Hominy was a Democrat when found, but he liked the smell of fresh, new folding money.

Hominy is eventually exposed by a young war veteran, a rival candidate for State Senator and his daughter's fiance. Which is all right by Hominy, for it keeps the job in the family.

Though Hominy Smith is lampooned for all he is worth by Kenny Delmar, he shapes up as no hefty contender for the popularity of the windy Senator Claghorn. Kenny should have called in some of Fred Allen's former scripters to smarten up the new characterization.

Danny Scholl, who clicked in "Call Me Mister," scores as the shy war veteran candidate whose convictions develop in him a semblance of effective eloquence. Keep your eye on Scholl. He's going places. Mary Hatcher is attractive as his fiancee.

Kate Murtah, from nightclubs and music halls, provides some amusing moments as an aggressive, drawly Southern belle. Loring Smith, excellent as the pompous magazine publisher, joined Delmar in a rendition of "Politics" that won the biggest hand of the evening. Salutes also are due 10-year-old Betty Lou Keim, Jared Reed and Fredd Wayne.

Director Paul Crabtree and choreographer Al White, Jr., have given the musical a swift pace.

A majority of the first-night audience appeared to like "Texas, Li'l Darlin'", greeted it with robust laughter and applause. But we regret we cannot share their enthusiasm. The new song-and-dancer has a few enjoyable and rewarding intervals, but they are spaced too far apart for a hit.

The Sun

NOVEMBER 26, 1949

By WARD MOREHOUSE

Folksy and Very Poky.

The State of Texas, that oversized chunk of real estate down in the Great Southwest, famous for the Alamo and Mary Martin, is brought to the New York stage in a folksy, labored and poky song and dance piece called "Texas, Li'l Darlin'," which shouted its way through two acts last evening at the Mark Hellinger Theater. I didn't have too good a time.

This new musical production, helped along with the undiminishing funds of the patient Anthony Brady Farrell, and tested last summer in Westport, is intended to be a satire on the cow country. As such, it is only partially successful. It's good-natured and unoffending, but there are more dullish moments than bright ones, and "Texas, Li'l Darlin'" is by no means the romp that it must have seemed on those midsummer nights in Fairfield county, Conn.

Johnny Mercer's lyrics are sharp and frequently amusing, but the music is routine and the book of John Whedon and Sam Moore, having to do with love and politics and a senatorial campaign in the Panhandle, is a plodding affair. The exuberance of the show's first few minutes is not sustained.

There are agreeable touches here and there. Mercer's lyrics are particularly engaging in such numbers as "Politics" and "Affable, Balding Me," done in Time-style patter. There is a good yodeling number, "They Talk a Different Language." The second act square dance is lively enough and the ensemble effects are well staged.

Kenny Delmar is a braying and industrious performer, without being funny, in the role of Hominy Smith, all involved in high-powered politics. The angular Danny Scholl, resembling Ted Williams, renowned Red Sox slugger, contributes a droll and entertaining performance as Easy Jones, Hominy's political opponent. Mary Hatcher is an agreeable heroine. Fred Wayne, playing a Yale man who knows how to take a rejection, is very funny in his proposal scene, and little Betty Lou Keim is pert and sharp and excellent throughout. Nice settings and costumes have been supplied by Theodore Cooper and Eleanor Goldsmith.

"Texas, Li'l Darlin'" is affable, ingenuous—and negligible. It won't drive you out of the theater, but, to my notion, it comes off as a straining and struggling satire, lacking in integration, in momentum and in humor.

New York Herald Tribune

NOVEMBER 26, 1949

By HOWARD BARNES

Handicapped

THERE is more exuberance than sustained inspiration in "Texas, Li'l Darlin'." The new musical comedy at the Mark Hellinger Theater has amiable performing, flashes of hilarious satire, and first-rate lyrics by Johnny Mercer. In its consideration of political and social doings in the Lone Star State, with an accompanying travesty on a picture magazine which is called Trend instead of Life, it has considerable bounce and gaiety. Kenny Delmar plays the leading role in the high tradition of song and dance clowns, while Danny Scholl, Fredd Wayne, little Betty Lou Keim and a huge cast work overtime to keep the proceedings from lagging. They are given slight assistance by the John Whedon-Sam Moore libretto and Robert Emmett Dolan's score.

* * *

Since wit and musical felicity are prime requisites of musical comedy, "Texas Li'l Darlin'" is definitely handicapped by having too little of either. "Politics" and "The Big Movie Show in the Sky" are the best of the numbers and they require a lot of stage business to become regaling. The lines make much of Truman, Luce and Federal patronage, but they lack the extra twist which might have made them uproarious rather than repititive. The production as a whole is somewhat reminiscent of "Oklahoma!", but it is no such delight as its eminent predecessor. The choreography by Al White jr. is generally random and Paul Crabtree's staging is labored rather than imaginative. The newest musical in town is a big, brash, entertainment, but it catches fire too infrequently.

* * *

Delmar, the Senator Claghorn of the air waves, is in fine fettle throughout the show. As Hominy Smith, who knows how to master votes from the cow country and the oil fields, he is rarely at a loss in evening laughter, even when he has to use a cane or a phony bow tie for props. He holds the travesty in a cohesive humorous unity when he is on stage, delivering corny eulogies on Texas, or singing "Politics" and the title ditty. He would have been far better had the work been cut more stringently. As it is, he is affable and amusing. Loring Smith is no match for him as the publisher of the national magazine, who wants to make Hominy President and steal the Lone Star State from the Democrats, but Wayne is excellent as the yes-man who gives a slight plot a bit of momentum.

* * *

The romance is handled by Scholl and Mary Hatcher. The former is funny with his stuttering delivery of dialogue and his pleasant voice. "The Big Movie Show in the Sky" gives him his best break, but he makes his own when the material falters. Miss Hatcher is a comely heroine. She never makes the love story more than conventional. Kate Murtah is on hand with a very thick Southern accent to give "Texas, Li'l Darlin'" needed fillips. Miss Keim is a thoroughly assured child trouper and Jared Reed and Ray Long contribute to the festivities. The chief trouble with a bountiful musical carnival is the fact that it tends to flag. There are enjoyable interludes at the Mark Hellinger, but they grow less and less beguiling as the production winds to its final curtain.

DAILY NEWS

NOVEMBER 26, 1949

'Texas, Li'l Darlin'' an Easygoing Musical About Lone Star Politics

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"Texas, Li'l Darlin'" is an amiable musical spoof about the Lone Star State and one of its political geniuses, Pappy O'Daniel, with intelligent lyrics, pleasant melodies and some engaging young people. It is easy-going and friendly—and good enough for me to wish it were better. It could have been quick and satirical, as was "Of Thee I Sing," but it just sort of dawdles along at the Mark Hellinger Theatre, where it was presented last evening by Studio Productions, Inc., and Anthony Brady Farrell.

There is quite a bit of look in the show, but it boils down to the story of a young war vet campaigning against a song-singing, grassroots politician who wears his shirts two weeks instead of one because it makes his constituents feel more comfortable. This contest has attracted the personal attention of the publisher of a picture magazine — which give the librettists, John Whedon and Sam Moore, a chance for some jibes at the picture magazine business.

The Secretaries' Song.

Johnny Mercer, author of the lyrics, packs more punch and stings harder than Messrs. Whedon and Moore. His songs, with nice melodies by Robert Emmett Dolan, have rhythm and rhyme and, often, a good satirical slant—as in "Take a Crank Letter," in which a group of secretaries explain just how far they go in their jobs. Sing they: "We reach the Bahamas, unpack our pajamas—and wind up with commas and quotes." There is another number, "Affable, Balding Me," which is an excellent parody of the Henry Luce literary style.

Kenny Delmar, radio's Senator Claghorn, plays the Pappy O'Daniel character and seems to have lost some of the noisy brassiness he had in his microphone career. But he can put over a point when he has to, as he does when he explains that a vote-getter has to get down in the gutter with the common people—and down there it's good.

Lots of Pretty Girls.

Mr. Delmar's opponent in "Texas, Li'l Darlin'" is Danny Scholl, an Ohioan who has mastered the whine-and-drawl of Southern speech. Sings well, too. Loring Smith gives a sharp, amusing portrait of a publisher. As for the ladies of the show, there are a lot of them and they are good-looking. The principal ones are Mary Hatcher, a cuddly and sunny-eyed little number who sings the love songs, and Kate Murtah, a great big Flower of the Southland who practically sings bass and is funny.

Theodore Cooper's scenery is a modest and fairly pictorial set of backdrops. In fact, the whole show is modest and fairly pictorial, and Mr. Farrell and his associates are offering it at a modest price. It is many cuts above Mr. Farrell's first musical venture at the Mark Hellinger, "All for Love," but Paul Crabtree's direction is slow. I just wish it didn't have to go and remind me what a wonderful, wonderful musical lampoon "Of Thee I Sing" was. Wintergreen for President!

"That Lady"

Daily Mirror

NOVEMBER 23, 1949

Cast Is Fine in 'That Lady,' But Play Isn't

By ROBERT COLEMAN

It is good to have Katharine Cornell back with us, but we wish she had arrived in a more worthy vehicle than Kate O'Brien's "That Lady." The new tenant of the Martin Beck Theatre is a Dumas melodrama with little excitement, a sort of "Green Hat" in costume.

"That Lady" was adapted by author O'Brien from her novel, "For One Sweet Grape." It has to do with the Spain that was in the late 1500s, under Philip II, who sent the Armada to be wrecked on England's shores. Philip was a nasty, narrow-minded, jealous and psycopathic ruler.

Philip had four wives, but still resented the attentions of Antonio Perez, his secretary of state, to the widowed Princess of Eboli. So much so that he doomed Perez to torture and eventual exile, and the Princess finally to solitary confinement in her palace.

"That Lady" (the Princess of Eboli) is sketched out to the dimensions of classic drama, but its content is shoddily melodramatic. The historical facts behind the play are rather fascinating, but they come to life on stage in garish and gaudy tones.

Miss Cornell has a flair for melodrama. So gifted is she, that she almost gives it the illusion of drama. She takes an essentially tawdry and empty role, and invests it with a semblance of meaning and merit. She makes dross glitter suspiciously like gold. Her strokes are bold and authoritative, without flamboyance. It is a performance superior to its inspiration.

Toria Thatcher, who was so good as the glib scoundrel in "Edward, My Son," is a forthright Perez. Henry Daniell catches the facets of the quixotic Philip's character. Henry Stephenson etches a memorable portrait of a compassionate Cardinal.

"THAT LADY"

Play by Kate O'Brien, adapted from her novel, "For One Sweet Grape"; staged by Guthrie McClintic; settings and costumes by Rolf Gerard; presented by Katharine Cornell at the Martin Beck Theatre, November 22, 1949. The cast:

Rodrigo.....Douglas Watson
Anichu.....Jada Rowland
Bernardina Cavero.....
Esther Minciotti
Pablo.....Peter Barno
Juan de Escovedo.....
Joseph Wiseman
Another Footman.....
Anthony Radecki
Philip II.....Henry Daniell
Ana de Mendoza y de Gomez..
Katharine Cornell
Antonio Perez..Torin Thatcher
Cardinal Gaspar de Quiroga..
Henry Stephenson
Estban.....Richard Sterling
Paca.....Lita Dal Porto
Don Mateo Vasquez..Will Kuluva
King's Footman.....
Wallace Chadwell
Manuel Ortega..David J. Stewart
Anichu at 18.....Marian Seldes
A Doctor.....Oliver Cliff

Synopsis: Act I-Scene 1. A drawing room in the Eboli Palace, Madrid, September 1577. Scene 2. The King's workroom, in the Alcazar, Madrid, midnight; four months later. Scene 3. Ana de Mendoza's bedroom, Eboli Palace, a few nights later. Act II-Scene 1. The drawing room; eight months later, October 1578. Scene 2-The King's workroom; 9 months later. Act III-Scene 1. The King's workroom; eighteen months later, January 1581. Scene 2. The bedroom; two weeks later. Scene 3. The drawing room; 9 years later, April 1590. Scene 4. The same; a week later.

Joseph Wiseman, in a brief appearance, achieves with restraint sinister portrait of a villainous conspirator. Douglas Watson is a fiery and effective Rodrigo, loyal son of the Princess of Eboli. And Marian Seldes is excellent as the youthful Countess of Pastrana.

The most robust applause of the evening was accorded Daniell and Watson at the end of a short and tempestuous battle of wills. Which indicates, we think, that Miss O'Brien has not done right by our distinguished actress-manager, Miss Cornell.

The settings and costumes by Rolf Gerard are stunning. Together with Guthrie McClintic's plastic direction, they make "That Lady" pictorially magnificent. We can only regret that Miss O'Brien's play is not adequate to its backgrounds players.

"That Lady"—*continued*

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune
NOVEMBER 23, 1949

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Period Romance, Period

A GREAT deal of sumptuous artifice has been lavished on Katharine Cornell's latest venture as an actress-manager. "That Lady," at the Martin Beck, is a heavily brocaded period romance about the court of Philip II of Spain, in which the verbiage is as lush and static as the resplendent Rolf Gerard settings. It finds the star giving a mannered and meaningless portrayal of the Princess of Eboli, who wore a black patch over one eye and created such a court scandal that what is known in the play as "civil liberty" went out like a light. Since ten scenes, spanning thirteen years, generate a minimum of dramatic excitement or emotional tension, "That Lady" is merely an attenuated bore.

* * *

The work is a dramatization of her own novel by Kate O'Brien. Its literary origins stick out all over it like a broken-down bedspring. Not only is the account of Ana de Mendoza's ill-fated liaison with Philip's secretary of state, Antonio de Perez, episodic and loquacious; it is highly uninteresting. Guthrie McClintic has made an attempt to give tragic definition to the production in his staging, but it is rarely successful. Henry Daniell, alone, as the Spanish king, creates something approaching a recognizable character in the windy proceedings and he is guilty of some wild acting lunges for sheer effect. Miss Cornell has not served herself well in choosing "That Lady" for performance.

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It may have been the black patch worn by the princess which intrigued her. She wears it stylishly, turning it toward the audience when the lady is in straits and keeping it carefully hidden in the chatty love scenes with Antonio. Meanwhile, she changes from a fiery matron, who defies her King and seeks a lover because of her mutilation, with the well known Cornell mannerisms. There is no "Antony and Cleopatra" to sustain them, as there was in her last appearance here. The process of watching Ana's spirit broken is not even pathologically fascinating. Her voice is eloquent and she ages gracefully, but Miss Cornell is acting in a dramatic vacuum in "That Lady."

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Torin Thatcher is the secretary of state and he occasionally makes the character romantic, even though he is called upon to address the princess as girl right through to the bitter ending. Henry Stephenson merely walks on and off stage occasionally as the archbishop of Toledo who intercedes for the lovers. As for Joseph Wiseman, in the part of Juan de Escovedo, who discoveres a clandestine arrangement and precipitates his own death and much ado about nothing, he gives one of the worst performances that has ever reached a Broadway stage. "That Lady" is dressed to the nines, but it is a woeful play, indifferently staged and acted.

The New York Times
NOVEMBER 23, 1949

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Although the play is perfunctory, the performance is superb. The play is Kate O'Brien's romantic drama, "That Lady," which arrived at the Martin Beck last evening. Since it brings us Katharine Cornell in a magnificent performance, we owe it a certain measure of gratitude.

For Miss Cornell is a great lady who can fill a theatre with warmth and splendor. As Ana de Mendoza of Spain in the sixteenth century, she is giving one of her finest performances and making the theatre seem again like an honorable art.

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Under Guthrie McClintic's sound and vigorous direction, Miss Cornell is well supported. Henry Daniell, always an able actor, is at the top of his style as a petulant, vengeful monarch. Torin Thatcher is the perfect romantic hero as the man of state who falls in love with Ana. Regally set by Rolf Gérard, the performance throughout is distinguished work—Joseph Wiseman as an intriguer, Douglas Watson as Ana's son, Henry Stephenson as a tactful, paternal cardinal, Esther Minciotti as Ana's duenna and Marian Seldes as her daughter. When the McClintics produce a drama, they give it the finest handiwork the theatre can contrive, and "That Lady" is no exception.

* * *

Sooner or later, however, we have to face the fact that Miss Cornell is bestowing her beauty on a drama that seldom comes to life. Although it has a basis in history, it emerges on the stage as stock romance amid people in high places who toss away great careers for love. Ana deliberately engages in a love affair with the King's secretary of state, who is a cynical philanderer. Their assignation turns into genuine romantic devotion. The King is schocked and grieved. He puts them in jail and nearly kills Ana. But the burden of "That Lady" seems to be that iron bars do not a prison make and epochal loves always endure.

This is a thoroughly legitimate attitude for a romantic drama to have. But "That Lady" never rises above situations that it contrives mechanically. Miss O'Brien, working from her own novel, has not really dramatized it. The central character of Ana begins abruptly in mid-career without much motivation, and is less interesting than the characters of the King and Ana's lover. Miss O'Brien's writing is commonplace. She says the stock things with no distinction. As a play, "That Lady" is rule-of-thumb story-book romance.

Out of respect for Miss Cornell's high quality as an actress and in recognition of her integrity as a producer, it would be pleasant to see "That Lady" her way. She must see in it some grandeur of spirit that never really touches the stage. Why was "The Barretts of Wimpole Street" an overwhelming romantic drama and why is "That Lady" so tepid? They are composed of similar materials. On the spur of the moment your correspondent cannot answer this question.

But the answer is not that Miss Cornell played "The Barretts" more passionately than she is playing Ana de Mendoza. For this is one of her finest pieces of work—beautifully and lovingly detailed, both modest and imperious, all grace and sincerity. She plays Ana so much like a great lady that you forget after a split second that she is wearing a patch over one eye. Acting of this stature deserves a play of tumult and character. Apart from the acting, directing and production, "That Lady" is ordinary stuff.

New York Post
HOME NEWS
NOVEMBER 23, 1949

TWO·on·the·AISLE

By Richard Watts Jr.

The distressing news today from the theatre is that Katharine Cornell, who can almost inevitably be counted on to provide the season with excitement and distinction, is wasting her magic on a long, dull and commonplace romantic drama about court intrigue in Seventeenth Century Spain. Her new vehicle, which opened at the Martin Beck last night, is called "That Lady," and it is the work of Kate O'Brien, who fashioned it from a novel of her's known as "For One Sweet Grape." My sullen impression is that it shows Miss Cornell and some other excellent players bogged down in a morass of pompous tediousness.

"That Lady" is a routine costume melodrama, with the melodramatic excitement left out and a plethora of words substituted for it. Laid in the dark and gloomy court of the tyrannical Philip II, it tells the sad story of the one-eyed but beautiful Princess of Eboli, and of her cruel martyrdom at the hands of the jealous and vengeful king, who loved her, when he discovered the truth of her romance with his trusted Minister of State, Antonio Perez. There is violent death and violent passion in the drama, but all of it is lost in the heavy-handed and unpersuasive romanticism of its ponderous literary style.

Vivid Period

It was a vivid and colorful period of history that Miss O'Brien's narrative contemplates. Its characters were violent, passionate and blackly brooding, its events bloody and stirring, and its atmosphere murky and sinister. Assuredly there was material for a rich and full-bodied melodrama or a deeply moving tragedy. With Miss Cornell as the gallant but hapless Princess, Henry Daniell as the sullen and embittered Philip, and Joseph Wiseman, who gave that memorable performance as the pervert gangster in "Detective Story," as the heroine's dour and implacable foe, there were on hand just the actors for such a tale.

Certainly Mr. Daniell makes a splendid Philip, showing the bitterness, the self-torment, the force and the weakness of the King with impressive skill, and Mr. Wiseman dominates his few scenes with such cold fury that the early death of the character he plays is a grave loss to the proceedings. The odd thing is that it is Miss Cornell and Torin Thatcher, the actor who was so good as the betrayed jailbird in "Edward, My Son" last season, who prove less effective. Save for one thing, their performances, too, are excellent. But, somehow, it is never possible to believe in the romance between them.

Miss Cornell

Miss Cornell is, as always, a vital and dramatic figure, and I cannot help thinking it is the fault of the play that the love

story of which she is the central character never seems properly moving or tragic. Lack of any real credibility or dramatic drive is an outstanding flaw of "That Lady." Everything seems strangely placid, unreal and theatrically ineffective, and there is little life or vigor in a tale of vivid and vigorous people. The writing always is oddly bloodless, even acadamic, and it seemed to me that the spirit and mood of a tumultuous period in history are never captured.

There is, I believe, one minor novelty in the play. In all the dramas and novels about Philip's court which I can remember, the dashing figure of Don John of Austria, the hero of Lepanto, has been the attractive central personage, and the Princess of Eboli has emerged as rather a sinister character. In "That Lady," Don John does not appear, but he is spoken of as merely an ambitious schemer, while the Princess is, of course, the luckless heroine. The novelty certainly is not enough to brighten the evening. Nor is the characteristically charming portrayal of an understanding Cardinal by that delightful veteran, Henry Stephenson. I fear this is one of Miss Cornell's lesser accomplishments.

The Sun

NOVEMBER 23, 1949

By WARD MOREHOUSE

Fine Acting, Tedious Play.

A vehement and cumbersome play, occasionally effective in the cloak-and-dagger tradition, and offering a beautiful performance from Katharine Cornell—there's your report on "That Lady," Kate O'Brien's historical drama, which opened last evening at the Martin Beck. Guthrie McClintic did the staging, and it's a valiant job of a fine workman in the theater. But put down the new production as a vehicle that will serve its star for some months—and that isn't worth her time.

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There are a few compelling scenes, along with some tedious interludes in the flamboyant "That Lady," which unfolds its tale of love, jealousy, intrigue, violence and torture during the sixteenth century reign of the monstrous King Philip II of Spain. Notwithstanding the play's looseness and listlessness, it does give Miss Cornell a nourishing role as she returns to us as the tragic Princess of Eboli, famous beauty of the Spanish court, who wears a black eye patch as a result of a youthful fencing accident.

"That Lady" is a love story in the "Prisoner of Zenda" school. It's a recital of the love of Ana de Mendoza and the importunate Antonio Perez, Secretary of State, and the persecution of them by the vain and moody King Philip, always devoted to her, and who became enraged upon learning that she was Perez's mistress. Philip imprisons and tortures them. Finally Perez, after years of dreadful confinement, effects an escape. Maimed and emaciated, he comes to Ana for a farewell scene and then flees to Aragon and to safety, leaving a sick and dying but happy Princess to accept the final edict of Spain's fiendish ruler—imprisonment in total darkness for the remaining few months of her life.

Kate O'Brien's play is encased in the somber and imaginative settings of Rolf Gerard, a new man in the scenic-designing field, and it is expertly played by Miss Cornell and her associates. Miss Cornell brings beauty of voice, warmth, dignity, regal bearing and vibrance to her characterization of the Princess, a woman of depth, truth and honesty. Henry Daniell turns in one of the best performances of his career as the bitter, jealous and frustrated King. His Philip is a neurotic and demoniacal ruler, but frequently an agonized and pitiful one.

Torin Thatcher plays the ardent Perez with great vigor and relish and is better in his dramatic scene with the fanatical and treacherous Juan de Escovedo, superbly done by Joseph Wiseman, than in his romantic moments. Wiseman, so memorable as the burglar in "Detective Story," has fire and fury as the crafty and self-righteous Escovedo, and the loss of him by murder at the King's command, early in the play, is also a loss to Miss O'Brien's drama. Henry Stephenson's Cardinal is mellow and eloquent. Douglas Watson is tremendously convincing as the Princess's eldest son, pleading for his mother's life. Marian Seldes is appealing in a short role.

"That Lady" is a rambling, old-style, historical drama that has been well staged by Guthrie McClintic, and that puts a good cast to work at the Martin Beck. But for all of the magic of Miss Cornell and the showmanship of her director-husband, it remains, for most of the way, a dreary drama of love and violence in the sixteenth century.

New York World-Telegram

NOVEMBER 23, 1949

Patrician Cornell Portrays 'That Lady'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Katharine Cornell is more responsible than anyone else of our day for perpetuating the true romantic panorama of the theater. Sometimes her whole career, and hence her life, seems to be devoted to the continued remodeling of a great portrait of gallantry, pride and beauty, of a quality which seems more real when more distant.

Now in "That Lady" she is giving one of her warmest and wisest performances as a patrician Princess of 16th-century Spain.

This Ana de Mendoza, an historical character, cannot be dismissed with familiar tags such as ill-fated. Because of her unfortunate love she grows into a person of internal strength who is beyond being hurt.

A Matter of the Heart.

A widow, Ana becomes the mistress of her husband's successor as Secretary of State to Philip II, who also loves her. The affair becomes much more unavoidably a matter of the heart than she had intended, and the couple is doubly vulnerable through the King's jealousy and because of her lover Antonio's wife and children.

A fanatic diplomat further complicates their devotion as he simultaneously slanders the lovers and plots against the King. When this Juan is killed by royal order, and the King is convinced of the affair, he vengefully imprisons the couple.

Ana could have been pardoned by agreeing never again to communicate with Antonio, but she demands the condition of his freedom. This expression of her love makes the King forever adamant. She will not relinquish her only bargaining power and finally ends her days literally walled up in the darkness of her palace.

Cornell Is Undismayed.

Such are the limitations and freedoms of theater such as this, that after almost three years of dramatizing her novel, Kate O'Brien has come up with a play of extraordinary thinness. It is clear that agonizing condensations must have transpired. The play is episodic and its language so rarely ruffles a wing that the thought of reading it holds little enticement. All of the script's impact and import lie in a couple of its scenes, which might under different circumstances have been spun poetically out into a richer play.

Do not think, however, for a moment that such perilous proximity to a one-eyed Flavia has dismayed or defeated Miss Cornell. On the contrary, all the lure of the original idea has clung to the production.

So the result is one of the most beautiful things to look at of many a day, glamorously lighted, firmly, intelligently directed, and acted by an uncommon cast. The star and producer has rarely seemed more exquisite, with her patrician fire and the maturing power of a character whose loss of an eye stimulated her to courage. The song and pose of Miss Cornell's fine limpid style are all devoted here to the flow of a story which in the final analysis it is up to her to keep in breath.

Thatcher's Antonio.

Torin Thatcher has a most apt roughness and flourish as Antonio and Henry Daniell is remarkably understanding of the vain and fading King. Henry Stepheson has infinite sympathy as the Archbishop and Joseph Wiseman brings striking verbal and physical patterns to the ominous Juan.

The production is subdued in cold grandeur and its remarkable beauty lies in texture and luminosity, which Rolf Gerard has employed dexterously to permeate the show's elegance with both depth and shine instead of color.